

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

LITERATURE

RINON (Y.) **Homer and the Dual Model of the Tragic**. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. Pp. viii + 220. £46.95. 9780472116638.
DOI: 10.1017/S007542691000008X

Rinon explores the lacuna between ancient and modern conceptions of ‘the tragic’, eschewing an exclusive association with the genre of tragedy, and seeing it (2) as, ‘a worldview reflecting the precarious position of the human being in a world determined by two factors, time and the divine, over which he or she has almost no influence’.

For Rinon, the tragic is a notion that articulates all mortal life, an experience that may be plotted along axes of fortune, from good to ill and *vice versa*). The difficulty of knowing how and when to avoid the dictates of chance, a skill which amounts to a sense of *kairos* (a word absent from either epic), is only resolved by the individual’s *anagnorisis* of his error(s) and limitations.

Chapter 1 (13–44) studies the *Iliad* as a tragic pattern, based around the rejection of compensation for an inevitable loss (for example, Agamemnon rejects Chryses’ proposal of ransom for Chryseis), which leads to damage (plague) and actual loss of the thing refused to be handed over (Chryseis), now without any compensation. Further loss may ensue if the character attempts to justify himself by imposing his will on others (taking Achilles’ prize). Rinon persuasively connects the behaviour of Agamemnon in Book 1 with Achilles’ own in Books 9 and 16, but he then argues that the transferral of anger to Hector is another repetition of that pattern. When he lays aside his anger in Book 24, Achilles experiences the ultimate *anagnorisis*.

Chapter 2 (45–64) turns its attentions to the *Odyssey*. Rinon focuses on suffering where the character is unable to affect the forces arrayed against him, such as Menelaus’ missed opportunity to return home to avenge his brother, and where it comes about because of a lapse in will or concentration. The discussion could sometimes take greater account of the narrative’s typical features, such as the ἦος | τῆος construction which Rinon terms *kairotic* (*sic*, 48) in Menelaus’ case (*Od.* 4.92–93). Rinon argues that characters must overcome their desire to avoid painful memory in order to achieve homecoming or success, and along the way he discusses canine

thematics and the function of the famous scar story.

Chapter 3 (65–95) begins with excellent reflections on heroism as a concept, suggesting that neither epic is a mere endorsement for force, and Rinon follows a well-worn path in seeing the *Odyssey* as a critique of the *Iliad*. The Cyclops episode becomes a fulcrum between the two poems and their values, which Rinon elucidates by combining Bakhtinian *heteroglossia*, where the voice of the character is contrasted with that of the author, with the now standard notion of focalization. With this duality, Rinon discusses colonial tensions in Odysseus’ island descriptions, before looking briefly at the Phaeacians and the homecoming itself.

Chapter 4 (96–113) considers flight in the *Iliad*, and the light it shines on Hector (who frequently flees) as a crisis in heroic values. Rinon makes many acute observations, though the application of Camus’ notion of the absurd to Hector’s decisions first to flee – and then to face – Achilles in Book 22 strikes this reviewer as forced.

Chapter 5 (114–26) considers, with a slightly disappointing brevity, Demodocus’ famous three songs under the rubric of *mise en abyme*, the first presenting the *Odyssey* in dialogue with the *Iliad*, the second reflecting the *Odyssey*’s poetic form and content, the third trying to influence the external audience’s reaction to the *Odyssey*. Again Rinon argues that the poet is encouraging his audience to reflect on the misery of life.

Chapter 6 (127–44) explores the tragic elements to the figure of Hephaestus, arguing that stories of his fall (especially in *Il.* 18) give him an anchor in time (crucial to Rinon’s notion of the tragic) and a quasi-humanity lacking among the other gods. Rinon connects this with Thetis’ pain over Achilles, but it could also explain Hera’s subjection to Zeus and her inability to have powerful children, Aphrodite’s pain over Aeneas (as Rinon goes on to admit) etc., somewhat undermining the argument. Hephaestus in Demodocus’ second song is connected with Odysseus in his trickery, and the singer in his physical limitation.

The book is almost free of misprints (28.107–13 (10) for 18.107–13; αἰρανέας (78) for αἰγανέας *Od.* 9.156) and well presented, but it is more a collection of generally related essays (four chapters were published between 2006 and 2008) than a convincingly unified monograph. Rinon’s individual readings are (professedly) humane, subtle and intelligent, if given occasionally to the

opacities of modern critical theory, although his constant emphasis on the 'horrific' nature of human life seems (to this reviewer, at least) a rather reductive way of engaging with the texts' vigour and realism. Nonetheless, I would recommend several chapters (especially 1–3) to both students and colleagues.

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